

GENITAL HERPES

Genital herpes is caused by a virus. The virus can affect both the genitals (sex organs) — including the rectum — and the mouth. Herpes type 1 virus often causes cold sores or “fever blisters” on the mouth and spread mostly by kissing. Herpes type 2 virus can also cause sores on the genitals and rectum and is spread by sexual activity (skin to sore contact). Oral sex (mouth to genital sex) can spread either type of herpes viruses to either area.

How do I know I have genital herpes?

Small sores filled with fluid appear on the penis, around the vagina or other parts of the body. These sores can break open and be very painful. You can spread the virus by touching these open sores and touching another part of your body. Before and during the first outbreak of sores some people feel as if they have the flu. They get swollen glands, fever, headache and aching muscles. The sores eventually dry up, scab over and heal. Even though the sores heal and go away, the virus is still in the body and can come back. How many times they come back is different for each person. Later outbreaks tend to have less sores, are less painful and heal faster. It is possible to have the virus in your body, have no signs and spread genital herpes to another person.

What do I do if I think I have genital herpes?

Go to your local health district or health care provider. If you have genital herpes, you will be given a prescription for medicine that may make the sores less painful and help them to heal faster.

- Keep the affected area clean and dry.
- Don't touch the sores.
- Wash your hands after contact with the sores; it's best to use an antibacterial soap.
- Don't have sex until the sores are healed.
- Wear loose fitting clothes, 100% cotton underwear, and no pantyhose with nylon inserts.
- Do not use cremes, lotions or ointments on the sores unless told to do so by your health care provider.
- Ice wrapped in a clean, soft towel and held against the sores will relieve itching.
- Women can urinate through an empty toilet paper tube to keep the urine from splashing on sores.

Important: always tell the health care provider if you are, or think you are, pregnant.

Is genital herpes serious?

Even though there is no cure, herpes can be managed very successfully. A baby can get herpes during birth which can cause serious damage if the mother has sores. It is also very serious when a woman gets herpes for the first time when she is pregnant.

What about my sex partner?

Your sex partner(s) should also have an exam and be tested if lesions are present. Don't have sex until the sores are completely healed. Usually about 12 to 24 hours before blisters appear your skin may burn and itch. The virus can be spread at this time too, so do not have sex during this phase of the disease. Your health district is willing to help you contact your partner(s).

How can I reduce my risk of getting genital herpes?

- Have sex with only one person who is not infected who only has sex with you.
- Use latex condoms correctly every time you have any sexual contact.
- Decide not to have sex — it's the only 100% sure way of avoiding genital herpes and other sexually-transmitted diseases.
- When you use drugs and alcohol it's hard to make good decisions about your sexual activity . . . be safe.
- Remember: Anyone who is sexually active can get a sexually-transmitted disease — including HIV!

Where can I learn more about genital herpes?

Call your personal health care provider or district health office. For referrals and additional information, contact the National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922 or for local Idaho Referrals and information the Idaho CareLine at (800) 926-2588.

